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July 24, 2007

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee on Housing and Community Development held a meeting on July 24, 2007 with Chairman Rebekah Gewirtz presiding and Committee members Aldermen Thomas Taylor and William White also present and voting. Also present were Monica Lamboy, Phil Ercolini and Dana LaWinter from SPCD, Dan Leblanc from the Somerville Community Corp. and interested members of the public.

The committee discussed the issues of displacement, affordable housing, development of Union Square and the Green Line extension and asked what commitments were being put forth by the city with regard to these matters. Ms. Lamboy stated that SPCD is exploring different policies to capitalize on housing and also said that she would seek information on corridor planning from the city's state delegation.

Mr. Ercolini told the members that a comprehensive affordable housing study needs to be performed in conjunction with the Somerville Housing Authority, state and federal government agencies and other interested parties and further stated that whatever policies are developed – the city would need public and private resources. Mr. Ercolini said that since its inception, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund has only produced 51 properties and he feels that developers need to commit to producing more affordable units. He also said that SPCD is looking to develop blighted areas in the city. SPCD is investigating ways to assist families faced with foreclosure, many of whom have been impacted by sub-prime loans and is seeking help from local banks in this effort. Mr. Ercolini told the members that SPCD's 10-year plan calls for an increase in dense development and noted that the decentralization of housing at the federal level has had a trickle down effect in affordable housing in urban areas. SPCD will continue to work Main Streets to encourage businesses to locate in Somerville, expanding employment opportunities and decreasing the risk of impact on renters. Green development is also being encouraged and incentives to developers are being explored.

Alderman White asked about the steps being taken to deal with gentrification resulting from housing developments and the Green Line expansion. Mr. Leblanc told the members that there is no single way to figure out the process of gentrification and said that the SCC received a \$300,000 grant to try to determine why it happens. He also said that the city had no warning on the gentrification of West Somerville and noted that there are signs that it might happen in East Somerville, as well. Mr. Leblanc said that resources are needed and noted that the 40B housing count is below 10%.

Ms. Lamboy asked for the committee's indulgence while SPCD compiles a list of the resources and participants needed to develop a comprehensive plan for affordable housing. Chairman Gewirtz requested a timeline from SPCD, including a public process for community input, and said that she would speak to Alderman O'Donovan to include the Land Use Committee in the process. Chairman Gewirtz also stated that she would like to bring in all agencies involved in the development of Union Square and the Green Line extension to work on methods to help residents with displacement and gentrification.

No papers were acted on.

Alderman Rebekah L. Gewirtz, Chairman
Committee on Housing and Community Development

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Committee on Housing and
Community Development, July 24, 2007

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk